

AN
ADDRESS 2,
TO THE
INHABITANTS OF NORTHUMBERLAND
AND
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE,

WHO PETITIONED AGAINST THE

TWO BILLS

LATELY DEPENDING IN PARLIAMENT.

By THOMAS BIGGE, A. M.

Government is the business of those who are appointed to govern, and of those who are appointed to controul them: But the BRITISH CONSTITUTION is the business of EVERY BRITON.

Bolingbroke.

We, too, are friends to loyalty.—We love

The King who loves the law; respects his bounds,

And reigns content within them: Him we serve

Truly, and with delight, who leaves us free.

He is ours, to administer, to guard, to adorn the state;

But not to warp or change it.—We are his,

To serve him nobly in the common cause,

True to the death—but not to be his slaves.

Cowper's Poem.

NEWCASTLE,

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IN NEWCASTLE.—SOLD ALSO BY J. JOHNSON, AND

MESSRS ROBINSON, LONDON.

1796.



An ADDRESS, &c. &c.

FELLOW COUNTRYMEN!

THE cause of my addressing you at present is, the measure proposed by the Whig Club of England, for the purpose of endeavouring to procure the peaceable Repeal of the well-known Bills passed before the late prorogation of Parliament. The zeal and interest you displayed in petitioning the different branches of the Legislature against the enactment of those Bills, persuade me you will not be less forward in adopting such legal and constitutional measures as are likely to effect their Repeal. It would be a scandalous insult on your sense, as well as patriotism, to suspect that, after having made so strong and meritorious an effort a few weeks ago, you will now sink into supineness, and discontinue all further exertions in support of the glorious Bill of Rights. Of such dereliction of principle I cannot suspect you. I cannot think you will expose the motives of your honourable opposition to be questioned and misconstrued, by your declining to persist in it with firmness. Nor can I believe that you are indifferent about inviting a fresh restriction upon the securities enacted at the Revolution; or that you will silently acquiesce in a measure, against which you have solemnly protested by the deliberate subscription of your names.

The alacrity with which you came forward, in concert with numerous other great and respectable bodies of your fellow countrymen, as petitioners in behalf of constitutional liberty, has obtained you the highest commendation. But remember, that the purity of the motive constitutes the merit of the action; and that it remains for you to prove, by future steadiness and resolution, the principles of your past conduct to have been genuine and sincere. A determined perseverance till the object is attained, will confirm the good opinion of your friends, and gain you the respect of all men of candour in the opposite party. But what will not our adversaries object to us, if we desist when we ought to proceed? if we relapse into lethargy, when our utmost vigilance should be roused? if we betray a shameful despair, when circumstances arise to give encouragement to hope? Loudly will they clamour, that we were not

sincere



sincere in what we expressed, and that acting from factious principles, our chief design was to embarrass the Government, and to discredit the Legislature. These are serious charges, fellow countrymen, and though not true, may appear true to many, if we conduct ourselves upon this great question with languor, indifference, or inconsistency. The time is arrived, when we may either refute these insinuations as injurious to our honor, or establish them as public facts. Can we, then, hesitate for a moment? Shall we voluntarily give currency to these charges, and confirm their credit? Shall we be guilty of weakness and insincerity, merely to sanction the reproaches that may be cast upon us? This would be truly singular; and yet we shall do this, and more than this, if we shrink from the test of our political virtue, and abandon the Constitution the first instant we have been checked in its support.

Some timid persons, who seek an excuse for inaction in the feelings of despondency, may, perhaps, object, "that if we could not successfully oppose the passing of the Bills, we shall in vain endeavour to shorten the term of their existence." To me this appears to be a false conclusion. Many reasons may have inclined Ministry to pass the Bills in spite of our first effort, which can subsist no longer if that effort is judiciously renewed. We know that in defending their perseverance in the Bills, it was more than insinuated by them, that the opposition was excited not by the nature of the Bills themselves, but by the influence of some powerful, and the arts of many factious men; that the petitions were the mere effects of party spirit, misrepresentation, and surprize; and that the people would afterwards rejoice that they had been passed into law. We will suppose these arguments to be *sincerely* urged by the persons who held them. What is the real object of this language, and the real inference to be drawn from it? It is manifestly used as a necessary vindication of themselves, in having persevered in a measure, against which there was a very eager declaration of public opinion. And how do they vindicate this perseverance? Not by asserting that public opinion in general is unworthy of their attention; but by attacking the means they *pretended* had been used to procure the declaration of it in that particular instance. This vindication of themselves, and attack upon their opponents, amount to a clear indisputable admission, on their part, of the weight which popular opinion ought to have, when coolly and deliberately spoken. And as this admission from them is no small encouragement for us to proceed with firmness, so it cannot be injurious to them to have their professions speedily brought to an unequivocal test. It is plain, then, that UNANIMITY will enable us to remove the chief obstacle to the wished-for Repeal, by depriving Administration of

those fallacious arguments upon which they resisted the first applications of the people. Their vindication of their own conduct can be rendered effectual only through our disunion and inconsistency. Why should we, then, sacrifice our own characters to the convenient justification of others? Let us rather tell them, by a temperate, yet decided course, that we are not a set of weak, subservient, and capricious cavillers; that we have neither been the practisers nor the victims of an intended misrepresentation; and, that cool reflection has abundantly confirmed all our first feelings on this most interesting subject. Let us tell them, that we still think the ancient laws of this country as sufficient as laws can be to the preservation of the King's life, and to the security of the excellent Constitution of *the year 1688*: and let us bring to their remembrance the just and celebrated language of the first speech which our gracious Sovereign ever delivered, that "*the LOYALTY and WARM AFFECTION of the people are the GREATEST and MOST PERMANENT SECURITY of the Throne*"

But the advocates of the Bills are unsupported by facts in their attempt to decry the late popular effort. Their insinuations are unfounded. For never since the Revolution have the people of this country acted more in the spirit of their glorious forefathers, by whom that Revolution was effected, than during their opposition to the two Bills lately passed into laws. It may be said, indeed, that since that providential event, by which the year 1688 is rendered famous in British Annals, few circumstances have occurred which could more powerfully affect the interests, the feelings, the opinions, and the prejudices of BRITONS, than any attempt to restrict the fundamental and tutelary right of free and public discussion;—a right which has ever been deemed the inheritance, the security, and the peculiar distinction of FREE MEN. To the frequent uncontrouled exercise of this right, we in this island owe whatever is popular in the constitution of our Government, or enterprising or energetic in the national character. From this source have we derived the lineaments of our liberty, and the muscles of our strength. And no longer than they enjoy it, will Englishmen preserve that erect and manly independence, that fearless and sublime deportment, which formerly rendered them the terror and the admiration of the world. That an attempt to restrict this invaluable privilege should awaken the jealousies of the people, was naturally to be expected: that it has roused their jealousies more than could be expected from their long supineness, is a fact we record with triumph and gratulation. It is in vain to calumniate the motives, or to depreciate the magnitude of their opposition, by idle sophistry and paltry quibbles. Into the motives and the extent of that opposition

sition we boldly challenge the severest investigation. To every effect an adequate cause must be assigned. When, therefore, we behold the great body of the people roused from their inglorious slumber; an affection for liberty pervading the kingdom with unexampled rapidity; men of different opinions uniting upon the broad principles of the BILL OF RIGHTS, transmitting to the Legislature a decisive, yet respectful expression of national sentiment; when we behold all this effected within little more than the short space of fourteen days, in opposition to all the advantages which the friends of the Minister possessed from the influence and information of their patrons, we are obliged to attribute so signal a union of popular will to some better cause than the artifices of rogues, and the credulity of fools. And in seeking for a cause, none other will be found adequate to so great an effect, than *the previous existence in the mass of the nation of an opinion directly hostile to the principle of the Bills in question.*

I shall now beg leave to say something of the INSTITUTORS of the proposed Association, because it is of consequence to the success of our undertaking that, if we support them at all, that support should be given upon reasonable grounds, and that, while we disdain to act upon a broad question of this sort in the spirit of Party, we should formally disclaim being actuated by such narrow and illiberal motives. The question then, I apprehend, is not whether the Persons who compose the WHIG CLUB of England merit our implicit confidence upon all subjects and under all circumstances, but whether they deserve a rational confidence upon this single point, and in this particular crisis. It is little to the purpose, from what motives they have instituted this Association, whether from Patriotism and a sense of public duty, or from personal ambition and hostility to the reigning favourite. The sole questions for our consideration are these, "Whether men of the purest motives and most disinterested patriotism, of the soundest judgment and the gravest demeanor, might not consistently act as the Members of the Whig Club have acted in the Institution of this Plan for the Repeal of the Bills? And whether, after they have stood forward in this decided manner, the consequences to Liberty may not be too terrible to predict, if we either desert them altogether, or appear lukewarm in their support?" To these questions, after the best view I have been able to take of the subject, I can for myself honestly answer in the affirmative. And it appears to me moreover, that, in this serious juncture, they have acted in the strictest unison with their avowed principles. Under this impression, it would be illiberal to question the sincerity of their motives. They profess themselves the friends of Order and Law, equally desirous

desirous of preserving the Constitution of the year 1688 secure from the inroads of Anarchy and of Despotism. They profess a wish to moderate the violence of contending factions, and to rescue men from the dangerous pursuit of political extremes. And these professions I see no reason to distrust, as long as they continue to act the wise, the firm, the temperate part which has recently distinguished their proceedings.—Let us, therefore, so confide in them, as to be ready to withdraw our confidence, the moment they shall cease to deserve it. *All other Confidence in Politics than this, it is unworthy of wise men to offer, or of honest men to accept.*

Having said thus much of the INSTITUTORS of the Plan, I hope it will not be thought necessary to vindicate the ASSOCIATION itself, as if it were a matter of doubtful propriety. A charge of illegality will scarcely be urged against it by the hardiest advocate of Tyranny, or the most unblushing student in the deserted School of Reeves. What! shall it be granted to the Soap-boilers or Tobaccoists of the kingdom to form committees for the purpose of recommending a Repeal of some Excise Law, injurious to the interest of their particular manufacture, and shall it be deemed illegal and unconstitutional in the PEOPLE of England, when they conceive that a Law is passed infringing their written and recognized Rights, to associate peaceably, and to consult with each other through the channels of Correspondence? Our Association then is defensible upon the fair analogy of precedents. It is defensible on better grounds, the Necessity of the Case. I should disdain to defend it upon the authority of the great Names, Legal and Political, who have been honourably employed in its Institution, because I am aware that the greatest of mankind are fallible; and that in such questions, an appeal to authority is but a surrender of Reason. Much less will I condescend to vindicate it upon the inapplicable precedent of the Associations formed in December, 1792. If this Association was instituted merely upon vague suspicions, unauthenticated rumours, and invisible alarms; if it was likely, first to traduce the Executive Government as weak and inefficacious, then to goad it on to a vindictive enforcement of the Laws relative to political discussion; if it could tend to warp the integrity of Jurymen; or to embody a standing Army of mercenary Spies; or to promote the communication of anonymous intelligence to the public Prosecutor; or to corrupt the whole system of public Morality, by establishing as it were, particular offices for the lavish reward of Perjury, Treachery, and Prostitution; then indeed, however plausible the pretexts, great the talents, or eminent the characters of its founders, such an Association should be unrecommended by me. A confederacy which might have the effect to cramp the free energies of
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the mind, and to destroy or pervert the best feelings of the heart, must always merit, and will, sooner or later, meet with the severest reprobation from all who dare to judge for themselves. Far different is the proposed Association in its primary intentions, and far different must it be in its ultimate consequences. The subject of this Association does not rest upon the mere assertions of the designing, or the suspicions of the weak. It is matter of Record. It stands visible to the sense in the last pages of the Statute Book. It is an object strictly limited and defined, consisting in two most important Acts of Parliament, respecting which there is an anxiety to obtain an accurate and peaceable declaration of public sentiment, that from thence may be deduced the Expediency or Non-expediency of their Repeal. Here is no room for interference with the prerogatives of one branch of the Government, or the privileges of the other. This proceeding plants no thorns in the path of social life. Friendship, and Confidence, and Intercourse remain in undisturbed security. No Barrier is opposed against domestic happiness; no Bribes are held forth to Treachery and Falsehood.

It may be expected that, in the course of this Address, the Bills themselves should be examined. From such a disquisition it is now politic to refrain. They have been so ably and frequently discussed previous to their enactment, that the nature and tendency of them (as far as they can be understood) can be no secret to any Englishman. But if they had not been discussed already, I should have forbore to enter either into the principle or the clauses, not more from a sense of my own inability to treat the subject as it ought to be treated, than from a conviction that a free and useful discussion of it could not have been undertaken without hazard. He who should perform that task to the best of his abilities, with the consciousness of integrity and the freedom of truth, might chance to owe his safety rather to the leniency of the Magistrate than of the Law; and to the discretionary power of Magistrates, respectable as they may be, on political subjects what Briton will not scorn to be indebted for personal security? I must therefore decline enumerating the reasons that have occurred to me, why those Bills ought to be speedily repealed. Trusting to the Intelligence, the Firmness, the Unanimity of my Fellow Countrymen; confident that what is commenced with Wisdom, and pursued with Harmony, must be terminated with Success, I cheerfully submit myself to the profoundest silence respecting the nature of the Bills, that the framers of them could possibly wish to impose.

I cannot conclude, without again exhorting you, by Union and Moderation, to second the efforts which Men of Character and Discretion are about to make in the common cause. Every method
which

which the Law and Constitution warrant, and which a peaceable person can conscientiously adopt, ought to be employed for the preservation of Rights purchased by British Blood, at the æra of the Revolution. Our Forefathers obtained those inestimable Rights at the risque of their fortunes and their lives; having obtained them, they made them hereditary and descendible to their posterity for ever. Thanks to their glorious exertions, we are not placed in the fearful extremity in which they stood. And may the consecrated Sword which then achieved our deliverance, be long concealed beneath the peaceful Olive! Ours is a mild and tranquil contest; the Combat of Reason—the Resistance of Opinion—the bloodless Warfare of the Mind.

In a few days, fellow-countrymen! the Declaration of the Whig Club will probably appear; it will be sent into different parts of the kingdom, where, should it be approved, local Committees will be formed to propose it for signature; and these Committees will communicate with the general Committee in London. This plan appears to me unexceptionable. But the successful execution of it will depend upon the fairness, as well as the diligence of the persons composing the Committees; for it is obvious that while every individual should be invited to subscribe, no influence of any sort ought to be exerted to procure signatures.—A good cause can be promoted only by honest means: Act, then, with CANDOUR and FORBEARANCE, as well as ZEAL: Let no one subscribe, who does not come forward with *heart* and hand. Finally, approve yourselves at once the Advocates of Social Order, and of Moral Freedom. The slightest consideration of what you have in view, must bring fully to mind the best means necessary to obtain it.

Your OBJECT is the RESTORATION and SECURITY of one great Clause of constitutional Liberty. It can only be promoted by the influence of VIRTUE, and the instrumentality of TRUTH.

What I have thus written, I now submit to your candid judgment. Had the task of composing this Address fallen into abler hands, I should have sincerely rejoiced. I must intreat you to ascribe whatever is weak in the argument, to the defects of the Advocate, and the circumstances under which he writes, and not to the Badness of the Cause. If it should be found worthy your attention; if it should tend to animate the fearful and the languid, or should determine the suspended judgment of even one individual in favour of the proposed ASSOCIATION, my labour will not have been lost. But failing in all these objects, I shall still enjoy the consolation of having written with the best intentions, and performed, without prejudice or intemperance, what I conceived to be an Act of most indispensable Duty.

Benton, Jan. 20, 1796.

